

Good practice



Targets: getting smarter



Learning+Skills Council

Top target-setting tips

1. Let everyone know what their own and the organisation's targets are.
2. Make all your targets SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.
3. Base your targets on accurate data.
4. Monitor and make regular assessments of your organisation's progress towards achieving its targets.
5. Identify barriers that might be stopping people from achieving their targets and find ways to overcome them.
6. Make setting targets an integral part of your quality assurance process.

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Reasons for setting targets



Targets help to raise the expectations of teachers and learners. They also provide useful benchmarks against which teachers and learners can measure their performance throughout the self-assessment process.

The Learning and Skills Council expects you to set targets as part of the development plan you agree with the Council and setting targets should be an important element of any plans you have for improving the quality of service you provide.

Targets can be set at all levels of an organisation; for the college, its staff and individual learners, and the benefits can be seen across the board:

- the work learners do and the measures they take to achieve their targets can enrich their experience of learning; and
- colleges can learn from working with other institutions to compare their performance against common benchmarks.



Good practice in setting targets

The points of good practice and recommendations in this guide are derived from real examples of successful target-setting gathered by colleges. They are designed to help you develop effective targets and realise the full benefits that targeted performance can bring to your college, its staff and learners.

- Involve all levels of staff and learners in the process of setting targets.
- Monitor regularly the progress your college, its staff and individual learners are making towards achieving their targets.
- Identify and deal with any institutional weaknesses that might prevent people from achieving their targets.
- Base your targets on information drawn from a wide range of sources, including national benchmarking and value-added data, as well as sources within the college.
- Make sure adequate resources are provided to help staff and learners set targets, monitor the progress of individuals and the college towards achieving their targets and plan any action necessary to rectify weaknesses.
- Build flexibility into your timetables to allow for any short- and long-term targets you might set.

Involve everyone

Include all members of staff and learners in the process of setting targets and monitoring what progress is being made towards achieving them.

Make everyone responsible for seeing that the college meets its targets.

Build flexible systems

Develop systems for collating and keeping target-related information that are efficient, effective and accessible.

Draw up a timetable for setting targets that fits in with your quality assurance schedule and is flexible enough to meet external requirements, such as those of the Learning and Skills Council.

Set targets to raise standards

Incorporate target setting into your quality assurance cycle.

Monitor the progress of your college in achieving its targets. You can use this process as a step towards improving the quality of your service.

Establish why targets have not been reached. This can help you identify what action needs to be taken to rectify any weaknesses in service or performance.

Recommendations for setting smarter targets

For the governing body or nominated sub-committee

Involve governors in the process of setting targets by establishing a sub-committee of the governing body to:

- conduct annual reviews of the college's targets; and
- regularly monitor the college's progress towards achieving its targets, using national benchmarks.

For course teams, managers and governors

Draw up a timetable for setting targets that can accommodate other requirements of your college, its governors and the Learning and Skills Council.

For course tutors

Involve learners in the target-setting process by working with them to:

- set demanding targets for individuals or groups of learners;
- regularly monitor learners' progress towards achieving their targets;
- use value-added data to monitor learners' progress; and
- celebrate each learner's achievement of their targets.

For course teams

Ensure your targets are demanding but realistic by:

- collecting information from a wide range of internal and external sources;
- setting targets that are appropriate to the college and the courses. If you are setting numerical targets, you might consider using a formula approach;
- developing action plans for achieving targets that specify who has responsibility for each action, set deadlines and recommend how progress should be monitored; and
- aggregating specific targets to produce general targets for the college as a whole. Present these targets to the governing body.





For everyone

Make sure that everyone knows what your organisation's targets are by:

- using corporate systems like intranets or management information systems to broadcast your targets; and
- publishing regular reports on the progress the college is making towards achieving its targets.

Monitor the progress of your college towards achieving its targets by:

- holding regular meetings of all staff and learners;
- identifying the barriers that might be stopping people from achieving targets; and
- devising an action plan to help the college overcome these barriers, build on its existing strengths and rectify its weaknesses.

Establish benchmarks by setting up local groups to:

- gather together existing benchmarking information;
- compare your college's results with those of similar institutions; and
- share good practice for setting targets and overcoming barriers to achieving targets.

Encourage continuous improvement by:

- helping individual members of staff to set their own challenging performance targets; and
- linking individual targets to staff appraisals or performance reviews.



Sample resources for setting targets

Information sources

Internal

You can use internal sources, for example the college will already hold information about learners that includes:

- pre-entry qualifications;
- attendance, retention and achievements rates;
- gender, age and ethnic origin; and
- progression to jobs or further and higher education.

External

Information you can use from external sources includes:

- national benchmarking data;
- value-added and examination data, such as that produced by the Department for Education and Skills and awarding bodies;
- labour market information; and
- information from local benchmarking groups.

Sample targets

Targets set for non-teaching teams working in support of learners might include:

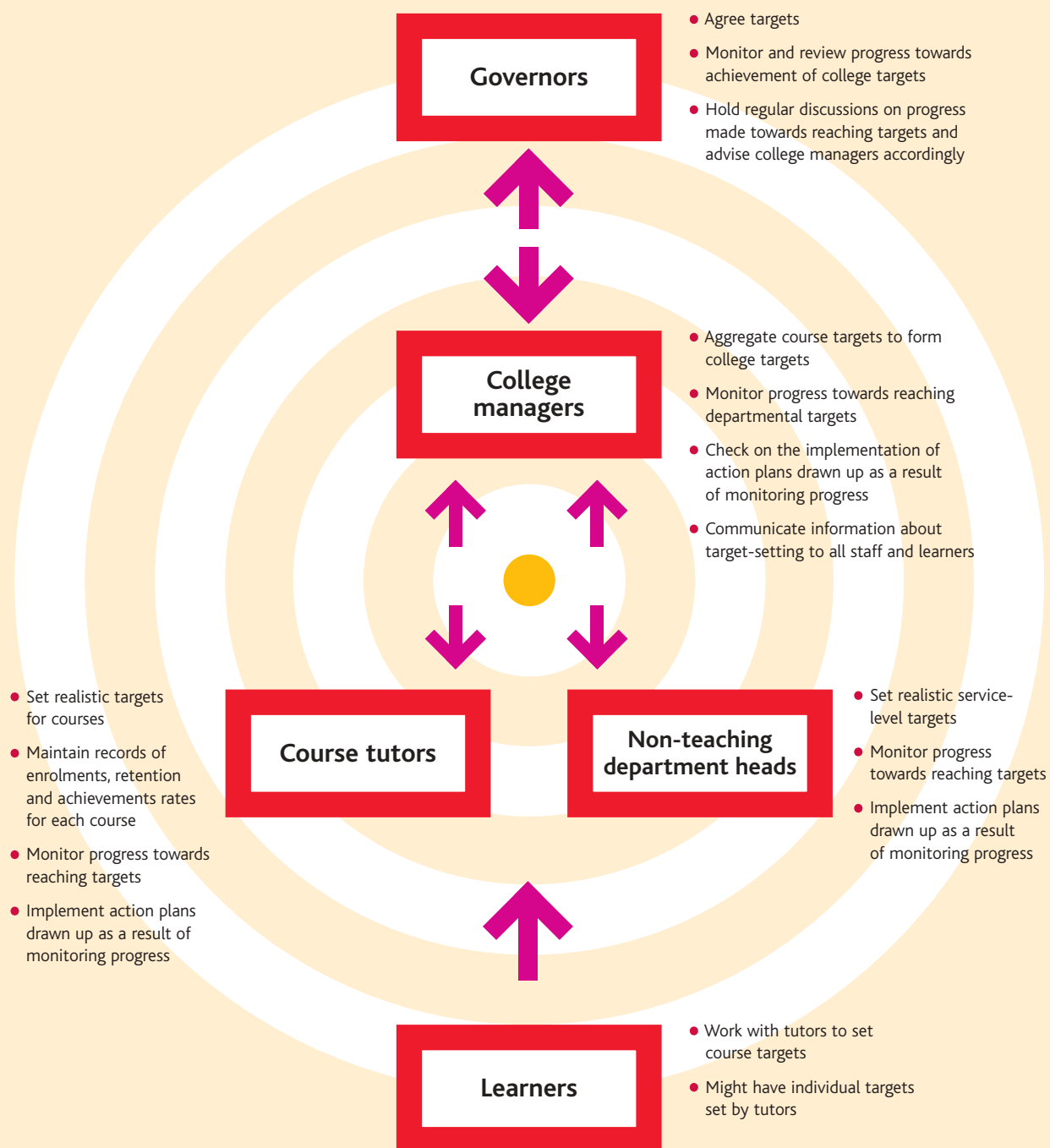
- the proportion of learners using the library or learning centre;
- the proportion of learners using the welfare or student-support facilities;
- the number of initial course enquiries converted to enrolments;
- the proportion of positive responses to questionnaires on facilities (for example, canteens or accommodation).

Sample barriers

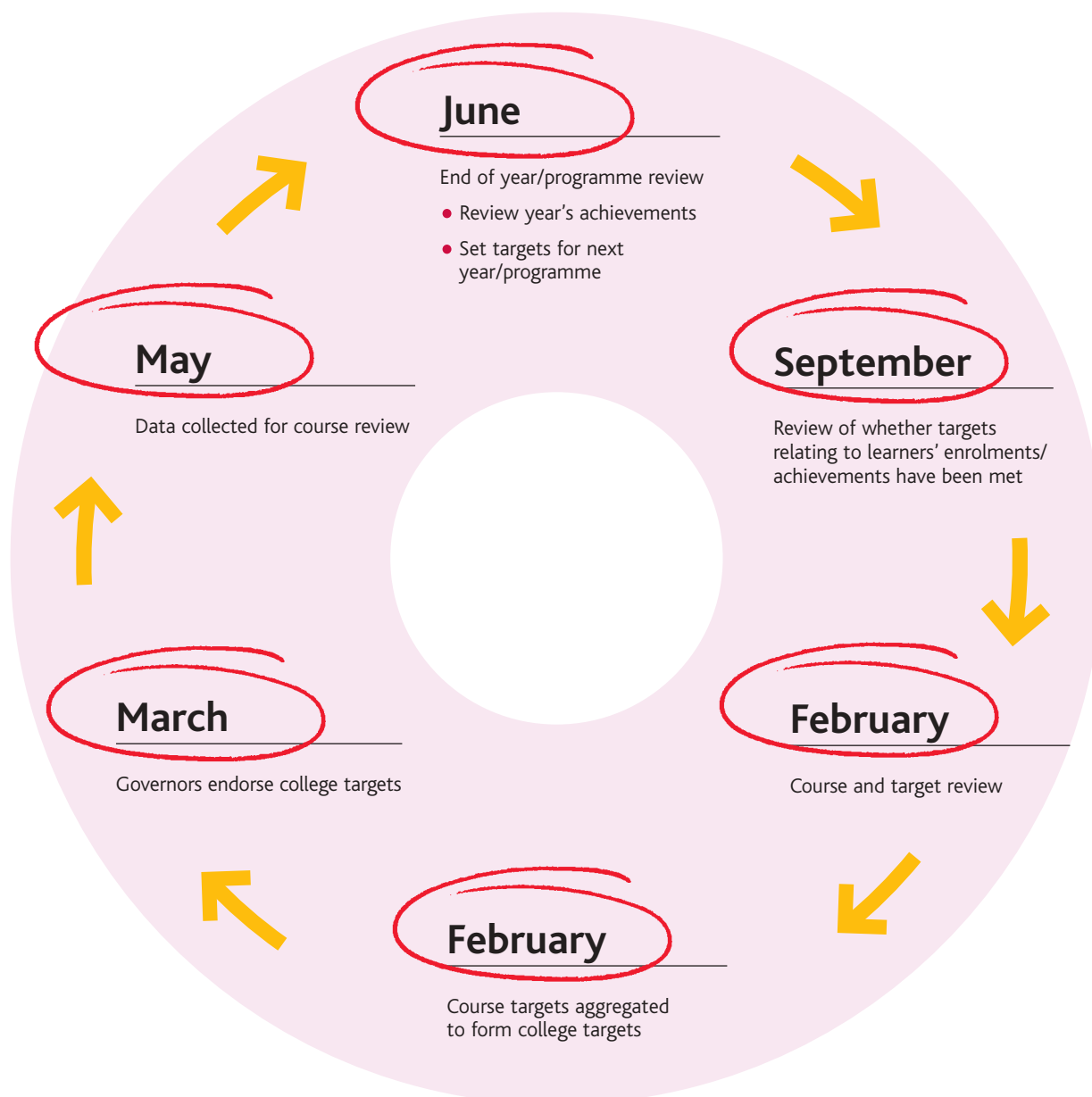
Barriers to the achievement of targets for teachers and learners might include:

- inflexible or inappropriate course structure (for example, unreasonable coursework schedule or incompatible assessment methods);
- inappropriate course content;
- mismatch between learning activities and teaching methods;
- poor initial counselling and guidance (for example, learners are not suited to the programme they are taking); and
- lack of additional learning support for learners.

Roles in the target-setting process



The target-setting cycle: a sample timetable



Checklist for setting smarter targets

Gathering your information

- Is it up to date and accurate? ☐
- Has all available relevant information been included? ☐
- Have you considered working with any other institutions to acquire useful information? ☐
- Are the systems used for collecting and keeping information being well managed? ☐
- Is your information easily available to everyone who needs to use it? ☐

Setting your targets

- Are course teams, middle and senior managers and governors involved in setting targets and in monitoring progress towards achieving them? ☐
- Do you know what targets have been set, other than those set for learners' retention and achievements rates? ☐
- Do the targets relate to the enrichment of the experience of learners, both in the classroom and through all aspects of college life? ☐
- Have targets been set that relate to the value-added factor in learners' achievements? ☐
- Are teachers involved in setting targets for their own performance? ☐

Reviewing progress

- Is progress towards achieving targets regularly monitored? ☐
- Is the monitoring process regularly included in the timetables of course team, management and governing body meetings? ☐
- Does monitoring lead to action plans and revised targets? ☐
- Is target-setting an integral part of the quality assurance process? ☐
- Is target-setting linked to other college processes, such as staff appraisal and course review? ☐

Improving quality

- Is responsibility for setting and monitoring targets shared by everyone? ☐
- Is information about targets being communicated throughout the college? ☐
- Is the achievement of targets rewarded or celebrated? ☐
- Is someone taking responsibility for initiating appropriate action when targets are not met? ☐
- Are there clear timetables for setting targets, monitoring progress and finding out why targets have not been met? ☐
- Are the timetables flexible enough to allow for both short- and long-term targets? ☐

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